



State of Utah

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NEWS RELEASE

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Final Chance to Comment on Water Quality Changes

Salt Lake City, Utah – The public has one last chance to comment on changes to water quality standards, including a cap on selenium entering into the Great Salt Lake at a hearing held 6:30 p.m. Tuesday at the Department of Environmental Quality, 168 North 1950 West.

Selenium, a naturally occurring mineral that can concentrate in water, can impact the reproductive success of shorebirds that nest on the Great Salt Lake. The issue has been the focus of a four year, \$2.3 million study to determine the first-ever numeric standard for the Great Salt Lake.

A Science Panel, comprised of selenium experts, tested the eggs of mallard ducks, which although don't nest in the open waters were selected because they are the most sensitive to selenium than any other species.

"In setting a standard, we wanted to take a protective approach," said Walt Baker, director of the Division of Water Quality and chair of the Great Salt Lake Water Quality Steering Committee.

The Science Panel concluded that some of the eggs may not hatch if the selenium concentrations are between 6.4 and 16 parts per million (ppm). The current average concentration of selenium in bird eggs is 2.7 ppm.

At a meeting in late May, the Great Salt Lake Water Quality Steering Committee, comprised of representatives of Kennecott Utah Copper, the brine shrimp industry, duck groups, environmental groups, state and federal regulators, sewer districts and others, recommended the Water Quality Board set a standard for selenium in the Great Salt Lake. If adopted it would become the nation's first tissue-based selenium standard. The Board voted to seek public comment on a standard of 12.5 ppm, a concentration at which there is a probability that one egg in 10 won't hatch. A cap on the amount of selenium entering the lake was also recommended should concentrations reach a certain level.

The Water Quality Board will take public comments to water quality standards until Aug. 20. For more information, visit: <http://www.waterquality.utah.gov/Rules/rulechange.htm>.

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